

**KIMBELL ART MUSEUM ACQUIRES CELEBRATED LANDSCAPE PAINTING
BY THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH**

Going to Market, Early Morning, 1773, is an important example of Gainsborough's innovations in British landscape painting.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FORT WORTH, TX—The Kimbell Art Museum announced today the acquisition of *Going to Market, Early Morning, 1773*, by Thomas Gainsborough (British, 1727–1788). Long renowned as one of Gainsborough's greatest paintings and a masterpiece of British art, *Going to Market, Early Morning* situates a scene of contemporary social life within an exquisitely rendered landscape and demonstrates the artist's mastery of light effects, color, composition, and fluent and varied brushwork. It will be on view to the at the Kimbell beginning September 28, 2023.

"Nearing the end of the museum's year-long 50th Anniversary celebration, the Kimbell is honored and extremely fortunate to be able to add such an extraordinary work to its collection," said Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell. "The significance of *Going to Market, Early Morning* cannot be overstated. Widely published and exceptionally preserved, it has, since its first sale in 1773, been heralded as an exceedingly beautiful work and an important example of a new style of British landscape painting invented by Gainsborough himself."

The painting is acquired in honor of Kay and Ben Fortson, longtime heads of the Kimbell Art Foundation, with gratitude for their leadership of the museum for more than fifty years.

Until recently, *Going to Market, Early Morning* was housed in two successive, esteemed collections. It was originally purchased from Gainsborough by his London banker, Henry Hoare, for Stourhead, his family's iconic country house and garden in Wiltshire. A century later it was purchased at auction by the wealthy entrepreneur Thomas Holloway for Royal Holloway College, near London, where it was a highlight of the collection until its sale to a private collector in 1993. The painting again sold at auction in 2019 and was purchased by the Kimbell through Simon Dickinson Ltd., London.

The enchanting landscape depicts a group of figures on horseback silhouetted against a misty, silvery sky as they mount the brow of a hill at the break of day. Commanding center stage is a graceful young red-

headed woman sitting sidesaddle on a russet horse. Details such as her glowing face and the golden flecks of straw in her saddle baskets, resonate in the dawn light. Slightly ahead, a young man in a brimmed hat turns toward her, his legs crossed to balance a basket on his lap. Hazy sheep are scattered on the wooded hill at right, and a tall tree with plummy branches leans inward, framing the cavalcade. In the foreground, pools of sedgy water reflect the sky. A mother seated on the ground at lower left nurses her baby as another child nestles beside her. Their spritely dog twists his head toward his counterpart at the head of the procession, bookending the composition.

The picture has been written about extensively and remains open to interpretation. The woman with infants may be seen as either a beggar, ignored by the more fortunate peasants, or as an emblem of motherly love or charity, an allegory that would have resonated with Gainsborough, who was known to be charitable to those in difficult straits. The group of three men following the pair going to market fit contemporary descriptions of colliers carrying sacks of coal by pack pony from small coalfields through the hilly countryside. As the focus of attention, the young woman with auburn ringlets and a fine necklace might seem implausibly romanticized, but her appearance may reflect the contemporary practice of sellers at local markets adopting the latest fashions to attract customers. Through Gainsborough's genius, the picturesque subjects and their setting are made both magical and monumental, surpassing earlier definitions of landscape.

Going to Market, Early Morning represents a particularly poignant addition to the Kimbell's collection as the museum's year-long 50th Anniversary celebration draws to a close. The painting elevates the Kimbell's holdings of eighteenth-century British painting, a fitting tribute to the British paintings that museum founders Kay and Velma Kimbell favored when originally building the Kimbell Art Foundation's collection. Among them were two delightful and representative early paintings by Gainsborough, *Portrait of a Woman, Possibly of the Lloyd Family* (c. 1750) and *Suffolk Landscape* (mid-1750s), both acquired by the Kimbell Art Foundation in the 1940s. The larger scale and striking visual impression of the newly acquired painting complement the Kimbell's full-scale portraits by Reynolds, Romney, and Raeburn.

ABOUT GAINSBOROUGH AND HIS LANDSCAPES

As a youth, Gainsborough had a keen love of the countryside around Sudbury, Suffolk, where he was born. Following artistic training in London and subsequent practice in Sudbury and Ipswich, the artist moved to the fashionable spa resort Bath in 1759 and established a thriving career as a portraitist. He relished the respite he found riding by horseback in the countryside with his friends, memorizing and sketching landscape motifs. He famously wrote to his friend William Jackson, "I'm sick of Portraits and

wish very much to take my Viol da Gamba and walk off to some sweet Village where I can paint Landskips and enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness and ease."

At the time, however, there was no viable school of British landscape painting. In his early work, Gainsborough emulated the naturalistic compositions of Dutch masters he admired like Jacob van Ruisdael, which feature deftly rendered plants and trees as well as roadways and small, scattered figures that provide interest and lead the eye through the picture. Later, Gainsborough was inspired by the more animated, vibrant effects of light, color, and brushwork in the Flemish landscapes of Peter Paul Rubens and by the captivating, Italianate light effects of Claude Lorrain. Although considered a naturalistic painter, Gainsborough was not interested in topography or copying an actual site or landscape motif; rather, he sought out more imaginative explorations of motif and composition to provoke mood and sentiment. Working primarily through observation and memory, he also used drawings and models to develop ideas for his compositions.

Going to Market, Early Morning belongs to an innovative series of Gainsborough's paintings that represent his invention of a new type of British landscape, and it is widely considered one of its greatest examples. After absorbing a broad range of influences from old master paintings, in these works he also represented the contemporary social life of the countryside. These canvases are more monumental in scale than his earlier landscapes, and the mounted figures have gained prominence within the composition, their poetic massing against the luminous sky creating an evocative mood and suggestive meaning. Gainsborough's musicality is palpable—its cadence suggested by horse hoofs lumbering up the hillside and slow movement expressed by the horses' lowered heads. Not readily characterized, this group of paintings reimagined the classical landscape tradition, enriching its dreamlike serenity with the vivid life-force of the English countryside.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Admission to the museum's permanent collection is always free. Admission is half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays.

The Kimbell Art Museum is open Tuesdays through Thursdays and Saturdays, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Fridays, noon–8 p.m.; Sundays, noon–5 p.m.; closed Mondays, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For general information, call 817-332-8451.

ABOUT THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM

The Kimbell Art Museum, owned and operated by the Kimbell Art Foundation, is internationally renowned for both its collections and its architecture. The Kimbell's collections range in period from

antiquity to the 20th century and include European masterpieces by artists such as Fra Angelico, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini, Velázquez, Vigée Le Brun, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse; important collections of Egyptian and classical antiquities; and the art of Asia, Africa, and the Ancient Americas.

The museum's 1972 building, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn, is widely regarded as one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the modern era. A second building, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, opened in 2013 and now provides space for special exhibitions, dedicated classrooms, and a 289-seat auditorium with excellent acoustics for music. For more information, visit kimbellart.org.

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Image Caption

Thomas Gainsborough, *Going to Market, Early Morning*, c. 1773, oil on canvas, 48 11/16 inches x 58 15/16 inches (123.5 cm x 149.5 cm). Kimbell Art Museum. Acquired in 2023 in honor of Kay and Ben Fortson, with gratitude for their leadership of the museum for more than half a century

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